DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 627 EC 303 352

AUTHOR Smith, Barbara J.; Rose, Deborah F.
TITLE Preschool Integration: Recommendations for School Administrators. Policy and Practice in Early Childhood Special Education Series.
INSTITUTION Research Inst. on Preschool Mainstreaming, Pittsburgh, PA.; Saint Peter's Child Development Centers, Inc., Pittsburgh, PA.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Aug 94
CONTRACT H024KK90002
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accessibility (for Disabled); *Administrator Role; Attitude Change; *Disabilities; Educational Change; *Educational Policy; *Educational Practices; Educational Quality; *Mainstreaming; Models; Policy Formation; *Preschool Education; Social Integration
IDENTIFIERS *Inclusive Schools

ABSTRACT

This paper offers recommendations for establishing meaningful integration opportunities for preschool children with disabilities, derived from the work of the Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming, a 5-year federally funded project of St. Peter's Child Development Centers, Inc., in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The knowledge base on preschool integration is summarized, indicating that segregated environments have not been found to be superior for developmental outcomes, that frequent interaction among children with and without disabilities is needed for positive social outcomes to occur, and that parents want their children to have typically developing or neighborhood friends. Eight markers for quality practices are listed, emphasizing that children need to be educationally integrated and socially integrated with their peers to achieve integration's positive impact. Policy issues that prevent administrators from providing integrated preschool services are categorized, as are attitudinal barriers. Strategies for changing policy and attitude barriers are listed. The critical role of the school administrator in developing integrated preschool services is cited. A model of systems change for preschool inclusion is presented. An appendix lists seven resources for information on early childhood policies and programs. (JDD)

POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES

PRESCHOOL INTEGRATION:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

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and

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August, 1994

One in a series of papers developed by the Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming to assist policy makers in developing preschool mainstreaming policies. The Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming is funded under cooperative agreement #HO24KK90002 from the U.S. Department of Education to St. Peter's Child Development Centers, Inc., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The opinions represented herein do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Education nor St. Peter's Child Development Centers, Inc. and no official endorsement should be inferred. For more information, contact Deborah F. Rose at The Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming, 2500 Baldwick Road, Suite 15, Pittsburgh, PA, 15205, (412) 937-3093.

PRESCHOOL INTEGRATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS[1]

Barbara J. Smith and Deborah F. Rose

Introduction

Preschool aged (3-5) children with disabilities benefit from being educated with their typically developing peers (Peck, Odom & Bricker, 1993; Salisbury & Smith, 1991; Strain, 1990). Integrating children in the early years appears to have a long term effect on later school placement decisions as well (Miller, et al, 1993). Therefore, it is incumbent upon public school administrators to ensure that there are meaningful educational integration opportunities for three, four and five year old children with disabilities. Not only are integration opportunities important for educational reasons, they are necessary under the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which establishes a preference that children with disabilities be educated in the regular education environment with necessary supports and services. The question, then, becomes "what is the regular education environment for very young children and how can public school administrators ensure that such opportunities are available to families and children?" This paper offers recommendations for establishing meaningful integration opportunities for preschool children with disabilities derived from the work of the Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming.

Background

The Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming (RIPM) is a five year project funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs. Through policy analysis, surveys of key

[1] Much of this information is taken from: Smith, B., & Rose, D. (1993).

constituent groups, and selected case studies, project staff have determined which policy and attitude issues are impacting on school administrators' ability to provide integrated preschool experiences for children with disabilities in their districts and strategies for overcoming these problems. This paper reviews the findings of the project of particular interest to school administrators.

What Do We Know About Preschool Integration?

There have been research efforts to look at the effects of preschool integration on children with disabilities, typically developing children, and families. Strain (1990) summarized many of these findings listed below:

- Parents report that they want their children to have friends who include children who are typically developing and/or who live in their children's neighborhoods; this is more likely to occur if children attend the program they would attend if they did not have a disability.
- No study has found segregated options to be superior for developmental outcomes for preschool children with disabilities.
- Developmental outcomes that are most likely to lead to post-school adjustment, particularly social skills, are learned very early in life and are associated with integrated programming.
- Positive social outcomes occur only when interaction among children with and without disabilities is frequent, and systematically planned by teachers.
- Research indicates only positive outcomes for typically developing children when they are in integrated settings.
- There is no evidence that children with certain conditions or levels of disability make more or less good candidates for integration, i.e., when the integration is of high quality, all children have had successful experiences in the programs studied.

And finally, there are long term effects of early placement decisions. Miller, et. al. (1993), report that children of matched demographics and developmental levels who were placed in integrated preschool programs were significantly more likely to be in integrated elementary classes several years later than were their matched peers who started off in segregated preschool programs.

What Are Quality Practices in Integrated Early Childhood Programs?

One thing we know about preschool integration is that the positive impact described above accrues to children only when the integration is of sufficient intensity and quality. In other words, children need to be educated with their peers - not merely placed in the same environment or "integrated" for short periods of time, e.g., lunch, recess, etc. Secondly, in addition to educational integration, children should be socially integrated, i.e., teachers need to know how to facilitate social interactions among children.

There are a number of ways that administrators can promote high quality and effective integration practices in their school districts. Eight markers for quality practices are:

- Administrative and professional commitment to integration;
- Planned, frequent, and carefully promoted social and educational interactions between children with and without disabilities by teachers;
- Comprehensive, state-of-the-art educational procedures which include intensive parent involvement, intentional methods of instruction, repeated outcome assessment, and well-defined curriculum content;
- Curriculum that is individualized to learner needs and abilities, and is developmentally appropriate;

- Blended, side-by-side, and otherwise integrated services, staff, classrooms, and instructional practices between "regular" and "special" education;
- Adequate supports for teachers and an on-going commitment to professional development in effective practices;
- Emphasis on collaborative teaming, planning, and decision making between personnel trained in "special" and "regular" education;
- Provisions for overall program evaluation that include the opinion of consumers (Salisbury & Smith, 1993; Strain, 1990).

What Prevents Administrators from Creating Integrated Preschool Programs?

The Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming (RIPM) survey and case study participants reported to us a number of policy issues that prevent them from providing integrated preschool services to children and families. The overriding challenge is identifying and then accessing "regular" or "natural" environments for children with disabilities aged three through five. Unless the school has preschool services for typically developing children, non-school programs such as child care or Head Start need to be considered. We asked school administrators, parents, child care and Head Start personnel to describe the barriers that impede using these community-based services as integrated educational settings. Respondents identified policy as well as attitude or belief barriers. We also found that even if the school had preschool services for typically developing children such as Chapter 1, ESEA or an "at-risk" pre-kindergarten program, there were perceived barriers to integrating children with disabilities into these in-school programs.

Policy issues are defined here as those written regulations, guidelines, standards, etc. that are promulgated at the local, state or national level that school districts must abide by in the

delivery of services to families and their children. These policy issues are categorized in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Typology of Policy Barriers

Program Standards: restrictive policies related to program or personnel characteristics; supervision of special education implementation; and "approval" policies for non-public school placements.

Personnel Standards: restrictive policies related to personnel characteristics.

Fiscal Policies: policies primarily governing the use of funds, i.e., limitation on use of certain funding streams for certain personnel or students; or limitations on the use of funds in or for non-public school settings including separation of church and state prohibitions. Also, this category includes how funds are generated, i.e., child count or per "unit"; and amounts available (re: rate-setting, amounts needed for integration, etc.); and how much time and service for which to contract.

Eligibility Policies: differences in criteria used to allow children to participate in services. The policy barriers are related to differences in the criteria between special education and integrated options of programs (Head Start, child care, "at-risk", Chapter 1 (ESEA), kindergarten, etc.).

Transportation Policies: policies governing availability, schedules, and prohibitions on non-public school or district use.

Coordination Policies: lack of policies related to the coordination of procedures, programs, and services critical to the planning and delivery of special education and related services in mainstream settings (Smith & Rose, 1993).

Equally troubling for school administrators is the presence of numerous attitude barriers or beliefs that impact on their integration efforts. Attitude issues are defined here as fears, concerns, or beliefs held by school personnel, community providers, and parents that make them reluctant to make a change from serving children with disabilities in homogeneous groups. The attitude issues are categorized in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
Typology of Attitude Barriers

Turf Barriers

- History and tradition
- Location of the preschool program
- Loss of control over curricula and methods
- Concern over receptivity of community-based providers to technical assistance
- Job security
- Concern that more intensive services can be provided if the public and private systems are kept separate

Teacher Preparedness Barriers

- Teacher certification requirements vary from public to private preschools
- Lack of resources and support personnel in community-based preschools
- Parents may be reluctant to have their children placed outside of the public school system due to lack of teacher training
- Some community-based providers question their ability to effectively educate children with disabilities - particularly children with severe disabilities and medically fragile children
- Child care teachers believe that special educators lack basic child development knowledge
- Curricula of some pre-Kindergarten programs is too academic - thus, potentially excluding children with disabilities

Awareness Barriers

- Lack of understanding related to specific disabilities, medical needs, early childhood programming and services, curricula and methods, integration efforts
- Need for research findings related to the benefits of integration to reach parents

Communication/Respect Barriers

- Parents don't feel that those responsible for placement decisions know the issues related to children with disabilities.
- Public school providers don't feel that community providers are receptive to technical assistance from the special education community
- Lack of information sharing and collaboration at the local, state, and federal level
- Information related to Head Start and child care programs is not effectively communicated.

"Someone Will Lose" Barriers

- Concern over the quality of education for all children when children are educated together
- Parents and educators of both typically developing children and children with disabilities are concerned that services to their child will be compromised with integration

For typically developing children

- Concern that they would not receive adequate services because the children with disabilities would require too much time and attention from the classroom teacher
- Concern that the child with a disability will be too disruptive to the classroom and would pull resources from the other children

For children with disabilities

- Public school personnel are reluctant to use community-based preschools due to a lack of control and supervision over the Individualized Education Program
- Parent and public school personnel fear that the child will not receive specialized services or the same intensity of services
- Common belief that children with disabilities will be "happier" and get better "special services" in traditional special education settings (Rose & Smith, 1993)

What Are Some Solutions to the Barriers?

Survey and case study participants provided a number of creative solutions to existing policy and attitude issues. Figures 3 and 4 follow and contain their suggestions.

Figure 3.
Strategies for Changing Policy Barriers

Program Standards Strategies

- Developing standards and non-public school program approval procedures that are specific to preschool environments: using the approval mechanism available through other state agencies which govern preschool and child care; adopting guidelines for approval that are germane to preschool programs such as the accreditation procedures of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs of the National Association for the Education of Young Children; and then adding the necessary specifications for meeting the needs of children with disabilities;
- Utilizing parent-initiated placements, which may not be subject to the same approval procedures (this does not necessarily address the "quality" issue);
- Requiring contracting agencies to sign program quality "assurances" much like those required of the LEA and SEA under Part B, IDEA;
- Developing a list of "indicators of quality" to guide LEAs and parents in making decisions regarding integrated options;
- Developing compliance monitoring systems for program quality to be used for all programs, whether school-based or community-based.

Personnel Standards Strategies

- Ensuring that special education and related services are provided under the supervision of certified special education personnel. These personnel options include itinerant teachers, consultative personnel to the integrated program teachers, and team teaching which couples a special education teacher and a regular education teacher for all services;
- Providing incentives for underqualified teachers to upgrade their credentials to meet SEA requirements at no cost to the teacher;
- Developing state education personnel standards that create new (or recognize other) credentials generic to early childhood settings, i.e., the Child Development Associate, personnel standards of state agencies that govern those sites (e.g., child care licensing);
- Providing in-kind technical assistance and training to community-based preschool providers;
- Providing qualified program personnel in lieu of funding or tuition payments to community programs.

Fiscal: Allocation and Contracting Strategies

- Establishing state special education funding formulas that provide for combining "fractions" of "units" to equal a full time equivalent (FTE) which may be an itinerant serving many different children at different sites;
- Developing funding allocation procedures across programs (special education, Chapter 1, at-risk, child care, etc.) that allow for combinations of various funding streams to be used in one integrated program;
- Allowing for the actual and adequate payment of tuition in integrated sites or the provision of services such as personnel, personnel and parent training, transportation, related services, etc. in lieu of tuition payments.

Fiscal: Church/State Strategies

- Developing a list of assurances that programs located in religious facilities sign:
  - The program has a Board of Directors separate from the religious body whose members sign a statement indicating that they make decisions independent of the religious facilities' Board of Directors;
  - The program rents space from the religious facility rather than having the space provided free of charge;
  - The program assures the absence of religion from the curriculum as well as the absence of religious symbols;
  - The program provides an audit trail that ensures separate financing.

Eligibility Strategies

- Schools and Head Start programs work cooperatively in the identification of children who meet LEA criteria or Head Start criteria. For those children who meet only the Head Start criteria, Head Start provides services. For those children who meet both Head Start and LEA criteria, the children are dually enrolled and services are provided by the LEA. In some cases, programs are "co-located" so that they can be combined for integration experiences but with separate personnel and administrative staff;
- Co-locating with Chapter I programs or other child care alternatives and combining classrooms while maintaining separate administration and personnel; team-teaching with special and regular education personnel in Chapter I programs that have children with disabilities integrated; providing personnel who are funded by both programs and meet all necessary personnel requirements.

Transportation Strategies

- Providing flexible transportation schedules and routes that coincide with schedules and locations of integrated sites (Head Start, child care, etc.), including flexibility in crossing district boundaries when transporting to integrated sites;
- Providing for reimbursement to families or others who provide transportation;
- Utilizing the transportation provided by the mainstream site in exchange for other education agency services or resources.

Coordination/Cooperation Strategies

- SEA early childhood staff (general and special education) engage in cooperative planning and activities are sometimes organizationally "housed" together in an Early Childhood Unit in order to promote cooperation. This allows for cooperative planning of program policies across federal programs as well as state programs (i.e., educational "at-risk" preschool programs, Chapter 1, special education, etc.);
- LEAs and regional early childhood staff (general and special education) engage in cooperative efforts and are also sometimes "housed" together in a district-level Early Childhood administrative unit to increase cooperation;
- Local school district early childhood staff engage in cooperative activities with integrated programs such as community program coordination and planning, or share resources such as transportation, training, related services personnel (Smith & Rose, 1993).

Figure 4.
Strategies for Changing Attitudes

Turf Strategies

- Placement teams with representation from key players
- Frequent, structured, on-going meetings to discuss attitudes and share team members expertise
- Establish a state and local vision statement that is intended to guide practices
- Enlist the support of someone proficient in facilitating discussions about attitudes (e.g., university personnel, human service providers)

Teacher Preparedness Strategies

- Improved communication and training between and among service systems
- Community service providers should be given the most current information and best practice for children with disabilities
- Make on-going consultation from special education personnel available to community providers
- Early childhood special education has a "family focus" that can be shared with community providers
- Early childhood special educators are expert at individualizing education for children and this expertise can be shared with community providers
- Community providers have a strong child development background that could benefit special educators
- Joint training conducted by special education and community providers can be used to share each program's expertise
- Parents should be active participants

Awareness Strategies

- Various technical assistance networks are in place for information sharing
- Visit model integration projects
  - Arrange a roundtable discussion of all team members to discuss the challenges and successes that the model program has experienced
  - Allow ample time for participants to meet with their counterparts to discuss their experiences

Communication/Collaboration/Respect Strategies

- Administrators must make a commitment to providing their personnel with the necessary time away from the classroom to collaborate effectively
- Provide common planning time during the school day to allow personnel to have access to one another
- State-wide commitment to integration by developing a philosophy or vision statement by which the State will operate its educational practices related to young children

"Someone Will Lose" Strategies

- Community providers who feel that they lack the expertise and training to effectively teach children with disabilities must be provided with the necessary training and afforded the opportunity for frequent meetings with special education personnel
- Visit model programs to witness, first hand, a high quality integrated program
- Parents of all children who are reluctant to have their children participate must be respected. Perhaps they could be provided with the awareness materials and research foundation for integration

General Recommendations

- Administrators set the tone for integration practices in the school. If the administrator believes that including all children is the right thing to do, attitude and policy barriers will be viewed as challenges rather than barriers. If the administrator does not believe that all children deserve to be educated together, the administrator can potentially create barriers to integration
- Guskey (1986) believes that there is a temporal sequence to attitude change among teachers. He believes that staff development activities lead to changes in teacher's classroom practices. Teacher practice changes lead to changes in student outcomes. Changes in student outcomes change teacher's attitudes (Rose & Smith, 1993).

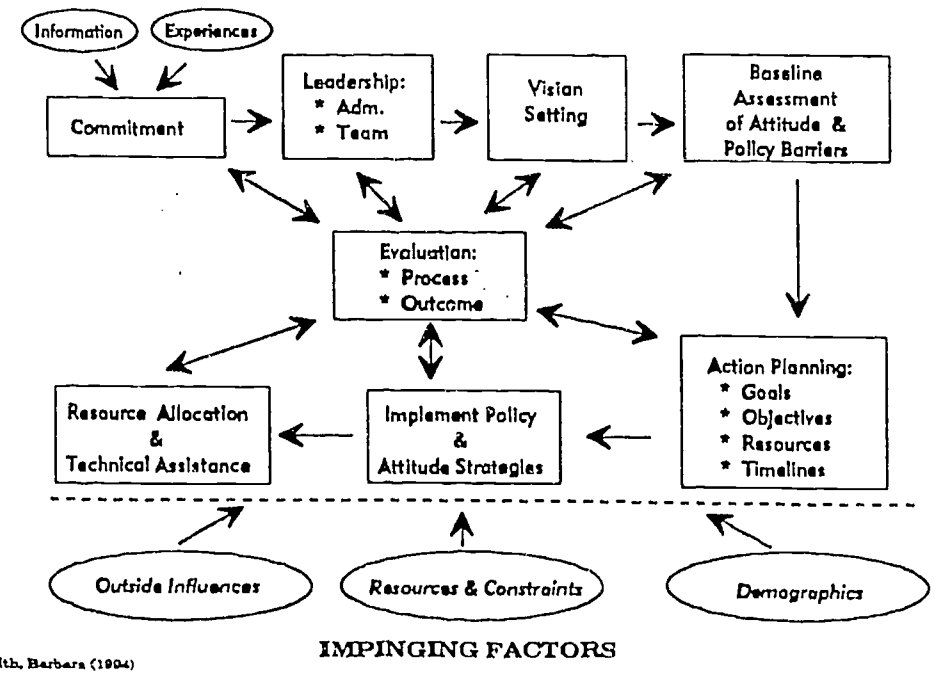
What Can Administrators do to Support Integration Practices?

The school administrator is critical to developing integrated early experiences for young children with disabilities. Where high quality integration efforts were underway, it was the school administrator who was cited most often as the key to change. Where resistance to systems change was reported it was also the school administrator who was most frequently noted as reluctant to make the change. Additionally, survey and case study participants reported that if the attitudes of the school administrator favored integrated early experiences, the policy and attitude issues were seen as "challenges" versus "barriers". Conversely, if the attitude of the school administrator was unfavorable toward integrated practices, each policy and attitude was seen as an insurmountable obstacle to systems change.

Figure 5 depicts a model of systems change for preschool integration developed as a result of this research.

FIGURE 1.

MODEL OF SYSTEMS CHANGE FOR PRESCHOOL INCLUSION



Our systems change model for developing preschool integration or inclusion opportunities is based on what people told us worked for them as well as the systems change and school reform literature. Each step in the process is described below:

- **Make a commitment and provide leadership**: as described earlier, the commitment of the school administrator was reported to us as critical to the successful development of preschool integration opportunities; second, it was important for the administrator to provide leadership in the effort by setting a positive tone for integration, establishing a team approach to decision-making and allocating resources; commitment and leadership are facilitated by the kinds of information and personal experiences available to administrators.

- **Team decision-making**: making decisions through a team process comprised of stakeholders (parents, regular and special education personnel, administrators, community prog personnel, etc.) was reported to us as a key to both ownership of the decisions as well as exploring new ideas and strategies; all members of the team must feel equal and that decisions are collaborative.

- **Establish a vision**: each team must develop a written "vision" of the outcomes they are striving toward, this will guide the work and direction of the team.

- **Set goals and objectives**: once the team has established their vision, they then set measurable goals, objectives and strategies related to identifying obstacles and resources for overcoming the obstacles, i.e., an "action plan" for developing preschool integration opportunities is written.

- **Awareness raising and attitude change strategies**: The team will need to educate stakeholders and the public to some degree about why preschool integration is important. Attitudes and beliefs are most often changed by information and experiences. Parents, school teachers and community program personnel will benefit from accurate information and access to their peers who are successfully engaged in integration practices. Strategies for addressing attitude concerns are described in Figure 4.

- **Cultivate leadership and risk taking**: administrators should reward and acknowledge those individuals who provide leadership and are willing to take the risks for initial experimental efforts.

- **Provide technical assistance, fiscal and other resources:** the individuals involved with integrated programs will need training, technical assistance and other supports. For instance, "regular" and "special" early educators often have received very different training, they will need to learn how to consult or team teach with each other, much of the effective curricula and methods discussed earlier are very new technology that most teachers did not receive in pre-service training; secondly, time and other resources will need to be allocated for collaboration, team meetings, and inservice training.

- **Change policy barriers:** if there are policy or procedural barriers like those described earlier, the team will need to develop strategies for changing them. Figure 3 describes policy options related to personnel and program standards, fiscal policies, eligibility policies, transportation, and policies that govern collaboration.

- **Evaluate the change:** it is important to evaluate the process and product of the systems change effort and to make corrections based on the evaluation data.

Conclusion

In summary, school administrators can facilitate successful preschool integration opportunities by doing the following:

- Become knowledgeable about integration

- Work to develop a district or school-wide vision related to integration

- Educate teachers, parents, students, and the community about integration - why it's important and how to do it successfully

- Establish a team approach to decision-making which includes input from all stakeholder groups

- Acknowledge and address all attitudes and beliefs about integration

- Develop policies and practices for collaborating with community programs and families of young children with disabilities related to integration

- Expand the concept of integration to include personnel, programs, and resources, i.e., systems

- Ensure that programs/schools are accountable to all consumers (i.e., children and parents) regarding the quality and design of curricula and instructional practices within integrated classrooms

- Ensure that teachers and other personnel are provided with adequate support and on-going opportunities for inservice training related to effective integration practices

- Plan for systematic evaluation of program outcomes for children with and without disabilities, as well as satisfaction of personnel and families

- Engage in systematic, long-term, collaborative systems change for preschool integration

The recommendations in this paper not only facilitate the availability of integrated service options for preschoolers with disabilities, but also address the attitudes of individuals whose lives are affected by integrated service delivery and the quality of the integrated programming. The administrator and the stakeholder team must provide the leadership to ensure that all three of these outcomes are met. In any change, leadership will be a defining parameter.

> "The most successful leader of all is one who sees another picture not yet actualized. He sees the things which belong in his present picture but which are not yet there ... Above all, he should make his co-workers see that it is not his purpose which is to be achieved, but a common purpose, born of the desires and the activities of the group." (Mary Parker Follett)

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APPENDIX A

Resources for Information on Early Childhood Policies and Programs

Council for Administrators in Special Education (CASE)
of the Council for Exceptional Children
615 16th Street, NW
Albuquerque, NM 87104
(505) 243-7622

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
of the Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
(703) 620-3660

National Head Start Resource Access Program
Administration for Children, Youth and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, DC 20013
(202) 205-8572

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
1509 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(800) 424-2460

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320
King Street Station 1
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 519-3800

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC-TAS)
Suite 500
NCNB Plaza
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
(919) 962-2001

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs
Early Childhood Branch
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 205-5507